A MANHATTAN LANDMARK

WILLIAM BELL WAIT

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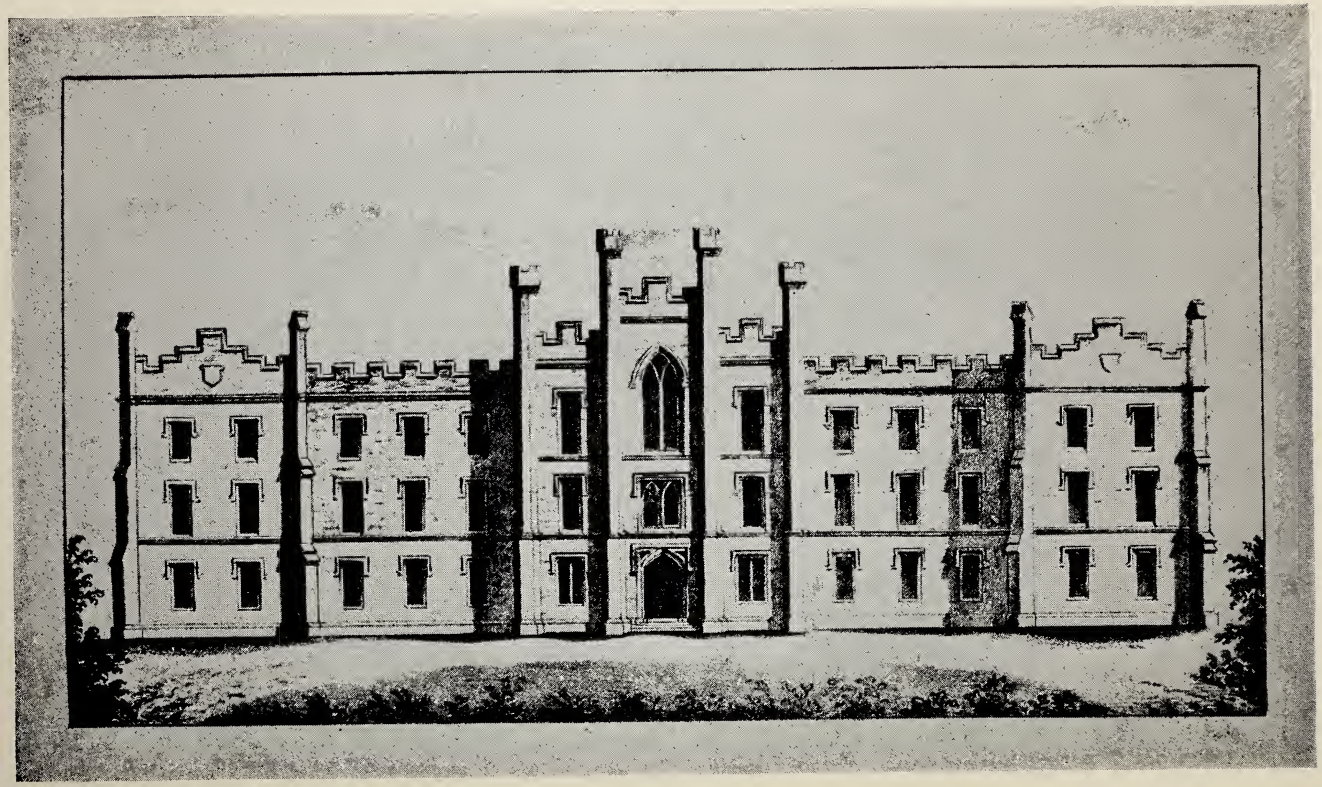

FRONTISPIECE

First known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind,
from the Report for 1837.

A MANHATTAN LANDMARK

THE NEW YORK INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND
AT 34TH STREET AND NINTH AVENUE

WILLIAM BELL WAIT

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The New York Institute for the
Education of the Blind
999 Pelham Parkway
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FOREWORD

The material for this brief account of the development of the site of the first permanent location of the New York Institution for the Blind at 34th Street and Ninth Avenue, and of the conditions and facilities under and with which the school work was conducted there, is gleaned principally from the printed Reports of the Managers, the Committees and the Superintendents and from the pictures of the site which are available.

In order accurately to depict the development as it progressed, many of the contemporaneous writings of those who, from time to time, were on the scene and took part in the work, are quoted at length in the original form, supplemented by personal comments which it is hoped may serve to clarify some references to the original structures and to amplify adequately the brief statements in the Reports relating to the enlargement and improvement of the buildings and facilities during the years 1870, 1879 and 1886.

Without claim to literary merit, it is offered as a brief factual account of the growth of what for nearly a century was a landmark in the City and has now disappeared from the scene.

W. B. W.

New York, January 1, 1944

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Page

FRONTISPIECE
First known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind, from the Report for 1837.

FIGURE 1 2
Detail of topographical map of New York City by Sherman and Smith, 1844.

FIGURE 2 6
Second known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind, from the Annual Report for 1842.

FIGURE 3 8
New York Institution for the Blind, from the Annual Report for 1846.

FIGURE 4 10
New York Institution for the Blind, from color lithograph by Henry Hoff, 1850.

FIGURE 5 14
Detail from the M. Dripps Map of New York City south of 50th Street, 1851.

FIGURE 6 16
New York Institution for the Blind, by W. Wade. Engraved by J. C. McRae, c. 1855.

FIGURE 7 18
New York Institution for the Blind, from engraving by W. Wade - J. C. McRae, c. 1855.

FIGURE 8 22
New York Institution for the Blind from the "National Magazine," September, 1855, J. W. Orr, Sc.

FIGURE 9 25
New York Institution for the Blind, from Valentine's Manual of the City of New York, 1865.

FIGURE 10 28
New York Institution for the Blind, from the Manual of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1868.

FIGURE 11 32
New York Institution for the Blind from "Phelps New York City Guide," 1869.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS
(Continued)

Page

FIGURE 12 34
Earliest known photograph of the New York Institution for the Blind after additions of 1870.

FIGURE 13 36
New York Institution for the Blind, from the Report for 1872.

FIGURE 14 38
Diagram of ground plan of original buildings of the New York Institution for the Blind and of later additions with dates of construction.

FIGURE 15 42
New York Institution for the Blind during construction of Pennsylvania Station.

FIGURE 16 44
New York Institution for the Blind, with brick wall and gate house.

FIGURE 17 46
New York Institution for the Blind circa 1906 showing picket fence (removed later) enclosing space between brick wall and stoop line.

FIGURE 18 48
New York Institution for the Blind showing straight path from main entrance to gate.

FIGURE 19 50
Bird's eye view of the New York Institution for the Blind.

FIGURE 20 52
Last known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind at 34th Street.

A MANHATTAN LANDMARK

The New York Institution for the Blind at 34th Street and Ninth Avenue

After the incorporation of The New York Institution for the Blind* by act of the Legislature on April 21, 1831, there followed a period devoted to organization, subsequent to which its work of educating the blind began on March 15, 1832 at the house of a "widow in Canal Street" of which location no more definite identification has been discovered, the first pupils having been three blind children obtained from the Alms House, to which number three more from the same source were added later.

The school remained at the house of "the widow in Canal Street" for but a brief sojourn only, the cause and time of its removal thence being recorded in a paper by Dr. Samuel Akerly, one of the founders and the first President of the Institution.

In this paper which was published, after his death, in the Tenth Annual Report, he writes:

> "In the spring of 1832 * * * it was determined to enlarge the sphere of action, engage other premises, and increase the number of pupils. Accordingly, in May, 1832, a house in Mercer Street was taken, other blind children withdrawn from the Alms House, and placed with those already under the instruction of Dr. Russ."

Referring to the progress up to November, 1832, the same Report says:

> " * * * In the mean time the children had been removed from the house of the 'widow in Canal Street,' to No. 47 Mercer Street * * * and in addition to the three boys placed under instruction on the 15th of March, three other children were added on the 19th of May following."

The stay at the Mercer Street address was about one year and, to quote again from the Report:

*Note: Renamed The New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, August 29, 1912.

FIGURE 1.

Detail of topographical map of New York City by Sherman and Smith, 1844.
Courtesy of New York Historical Society, New York City.

"On the 1st of May, 1833, the school was removed to No. 62 Spring Street, where it continued till the 1st November in the same year, when it was transferred to the premises at present occupied; The Board agreeing to the offer of Mr. Boorman, to lease them at a 'nominal rent' with the privilege of purchase within a given time."

Of the hegira from the old to the new home the First Annual Report for the year 1836 makes the following comment:

" * * * Mr. James Boorman gave a favorable lease of a piece of ground and buildings on the 8th Avenue, at a nominal rent, and with a covenant to sell. The premises so obtained on lease were first occupied in October 1833, and the Institution for the Blind is now permanently established at that place."

again:

"At the end of 1833 the Institution was established in the neighborhood of this city on the 8th Avenue, where it is destined to be permanently situated."

and finally:

"The site is an eligible one, on rising ground, overlooking the Hudson river and the Jersey shore, with a dry and gravelly soil."

The Sherman & Smith Topographical Map of New York City (1844), of which Figure 1 is an extract, does not show the new buildings which by that time had been erected by the Institution but is doubtless a good representation of that part of the city at about the time when the property was acquired in 1833, the Report for 1836 having described it as being "in the neighborhood of this city" and as "rising ground, overlooking the Hudson river and the Jersey shore."

"Strawberry Hill" as it was called, is seen (Figure 1) extending in a northerly direction from Eighth Avenue and 29th Street to Eleventh Avenue and 39th Street. On the eastern part of this hill lay the property ultimately bought by the Institution, which, as can be seen, was part of a larger plot extending beyond the street line of 34th Street on the north and that of 33rd Street on the south.

About half a mile to the eastward one notes the western

slope of "Murray Hill," the "Reservoir" at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue and but few houses in the valley between the hills or to the south.

At the time when the school took possession the streets and avenues had not been opened and regulated, the ultimate changes in grade in 34th Street being apparent in Figures 10, 12 and 20.

In the records of the Institution the only reference to the buildings then on the land and available for school purposes is found in a report by the Managers, made on the occasion of an exhibition held at the City Hotel on December 2nd, 1833 which describes the buildings as being "capable of accommodating a large number of pupils," but fortunately the NEW YORK GAZETTE AND GENERAL ADVERTISER of August 14, 1833 affords a more ample description:

> "MUNIFICENT GIFT.—James Boorman, Esq., of this city, has presented to the New York Institution for the Blind, a ten years lease of the buildings and ground formerly called Abington Place, a short distance beyond the paved part of the city, and between the 8th and 9th avenues. The main building on the premises is a large substantial two story house, 100 by 54 feet, situated on a rising ground overlooking the Hudson River. There are also two stone kitchens apart from the main building, and a well of good water near the house. The ground is now in good order, under cultivation as a garden, and contains a little over two acres. The situation is stated to be one of the pleasantest on Manhattan Island, in the immediate vicinity of the city, and offers fine air, good soil for cultivation, a shady grove and flower garden, with wide and level paths. The house is very large, two stories high, with a spacious attic, abundantly large enough for a workshop and place for exercise in bad weather, while the distance from the City Hall is only about three miles."

The buildings thus described must have been devoid of modern conveniences for, as commented by the GAZETTE, the premises were "a short distance beyond the paved part of the city." Water supply and sewers were still lacking and gas and other modern improvements remained still to come.

In the lease from Mr. Boorman to the Institution dated July

4, 1833, and recorded on November 8, 1833, in Liber Conveyances 304, page 202, appears a description of the premises, the rental and other terms:

" * * * the Westerly half of the Block between the Eighth and Ninth Avenues and between thirty-third and thirty-fourth Streets and the half of thirty-third Street adjoining the same Bounded on the Southerly side by the Southerly half of Thirty-third Street, on the Westerly side by the Ninth Avenue, on the Northerly side by Thirty-fourth Street and on the Easterly side by the Easterly half of the aforesaid block and in part by Thirty-third Street, Containing and measuring the Southerly and Northerly sides each 400 feet and on the Easterly and Westerly sides each 227 feet 4 inches.

"TO HAVE AND TO HOLD * * * unto the said parties of the second part and their successors from the first day of May 1833 for and during and until the full end and term of Nine years thence next ensuing and fully to be complete and ended yielding and paying therefor unto the said party of the first part, his heirs or assigns, yearly or every year during the term hereby granted, the yearly rent or sum of One pepper corn."

Among other conditions, the lease provided that:

The tenant should pay all taxes;

The landlord should open 34th Street from Eighth to Ninth Avenue;

The premises should not be sublet but used for the purposes of the Institution only;

The tenant should have the right during the term to purchase the property for $10,400 with interest at 5% from May 1, 1832, and

If purchased, the premises should continue to be used by the Institution until July 4, 1863 under penalty of forfeiture.

It is interesting that the First Annual Report refers to the property as being located on Eighth Avenue instead of Ninth Avenue, as was the fact.

The years 1834 and 1835 were uneventful in the history of the Institution but the need for more and better facilities and the desire of the Institution to acquire its own school

FIGURE 2.
Second known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind,
from the Annual Report for 1842.

premises became apparent in the application to the Legislature for aid, followed on April 30, 1836, by the passage of an act (Laws of 1836, Chapter 226) which appropriated $12,000 to purchase the ground and buildings thereon, occupied by the Institution, "the conveyance thereof to be made to the people of this State."

However, at that point Mr. Boorman objected and refused to sell to the State, although ready and willing to comply with the terms of the lease and sell to The New York Institution for the Blind. That necessitated another application to the Legislature, which, on May 20, 1836 passed an act (Laws of 1836, Chapter 399) confirming the earlier appropriation of $12,000 provided the Institution would raise $8,000, all of which to be applied:

> " * * * by the managers of the institution, for the purposes of purchasing the fee simple of the premises now occupied by them, and also for the erection of a work-shop for the blind, and for the repair of the buildings now on the said premises. And the title thereto shall be vested in the managers of the said institution, in conformity to the conditions of a lease given to them by James Boorman of the City of New-York, * * * .
>
> " * * * and in order that the institution may be more permanently and usefully established, it shall not be removed from its present site before the expiration of fifty years from the time of its purchase aforesaid."

The deed of the premises from James Boorman and his wife to The New York Institution for the Blind, dated July 29, 1837 and recorded in Liber 381 of Conveyances, page 32, incorporates the restrictions and limitations contained in the lease of July 4, 1833 and for a stated consideration of $13,130 conveys:

> "All that certain piece or parcel of ground together with the buildings thereon erected situate lying and being in the Sixteenth (late Twelfth) Ward of the City of New York being the Westerly half of the Block between the Eighth and Ninth Avenues and between Thirty Third and Thirty Fourth Streets Bounded on the Southerly side of (sic) Thirty Third Street

ELEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

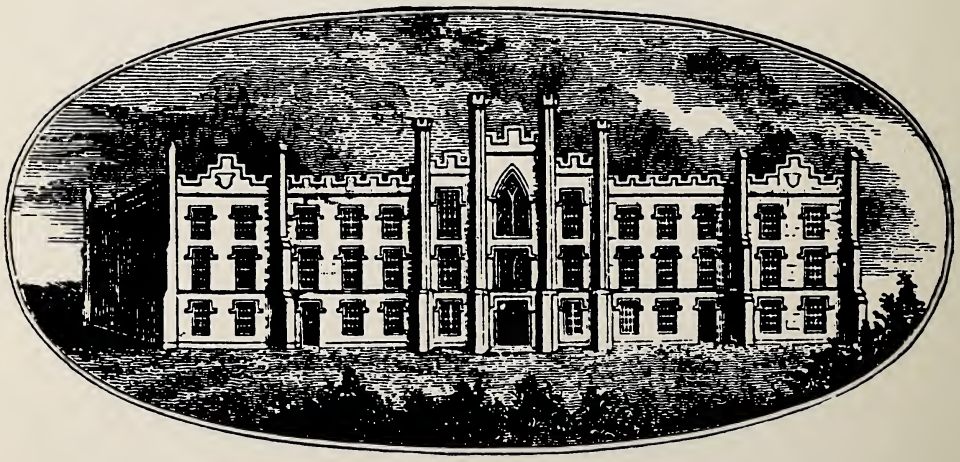
MANAGERS

OF THE

NEW-YORK INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND

TO

THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE.



MADE IN CONFORMITY TO LAW.

February, 1847.

FOR THE PRECEDING YEAR.

FIGURE 3.
New York Institution for the Blind, from the Annual Report for 1846.

as laid down upon the Commissioners Map of the City of New York on the Westerly side by the Ninth Avenue on the Northerly side by Thirty-fourth Street and on the Easterly side by the Easterly half of the aforesaid Block Together with all the right title interest and property of the said parties of the first part of in and to the Northerly half of Thirty-third Street and in and to the Southerly half of Thirty-fourth Street in front of and opposite to the said above described premises."

It was specifically provided that the premises conveyed to the Institution should not be sold or rented but be used for school purposes only until July 4, 1863 under penalty of forfeiture.

The premises thus conveyed were held and occupied by the Institution until 1924.

The first suggestion of the extent of the ultimate structure, of which the "work-shop for the blind" mentioned in the Act of 1836 was to be a beginning only, is found in the Report for 1837:

"The next step was to apply the balance of the $20,266.69 to repairs and the erection of a workshop, both of which purposes have been executed in part. To determine the position of the building for mechanical operations was attended with some difficulty and delay. The streets on the northerly and southerly sides of the premises are yet to be opened and regulated, and it was important so to place the building that it would not be disturbed by future improvements of the adjacent grounds. It was finally decided by the Board of Managers that it should be placed on the northerly side of the grounds recently purchased, in such a manner as not to disturb the present building occupied by the blind, and to form one wing of an edifice hereafter to be constructed of stone, with more convenient and ample accommodations, and in which the sightless inmates may be more secure than in an edifice of wood. This wing, which is now being erected, is to be larger than at first contemplated, and the upper or third story is to form a spacious, airy and secure dormitory, while the two lower floors (130 by 29 feet) are to be appropriated to the working department."

FIGURE 4.

New York Institution for the Blind, from color lithograph by Henry Hoff, 1850.
Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, New York City.

Today, even an intimate knowledge of the buildings on the 34th Street site after the extensive alterations and additions of 1870 does not enable one completely to reconcile all of the references to the buildings which appear in the early reports but one is able to produce a clear picture of the structure and its growth.

From the Appendix to the Annual Report for 1837 we learn that the north wing was built first:

> "The North Wing of the New Building was commenced in November, 1837, and the fourteenth day of that month was designated for laying the corner stone, to be accompanied with appropriate ceremonies and addresses. These, however were all suspended by the intervention of a severe and unusual snow storm on that day, and all proceedings were postponed until the 6th of December, following."

and to quote from the address of Dr. Akerly on the occasion of the laying of the corner stone December 6th, 1837:

> "Here you see the commencement of an enlarged plan for a building for the Blind, the northern wing of which is in outline before you. When this part is completed it will be appropriated to mechanical employments, and a safe dormitory. The main or centre building and the southern wing, will hereafter be erected, when additional accomodations are required, and the community are willing to contribute the means for their erection."

The earliest known picture of the new school is found in the Report for 1837 (Frontispiece). The portion between the buttresses at the left is the west end of the north wing and similar construction of the south wing may be seen at the right while the "main or centre" building lies between the wings. Originally, as will appear, the center door apparently was not intended for the main entrance but became such later. The circular path from the building to the gate on Ninth Avenue which appears in this first picture of the school remained in use until some time after 1870, when a straight path was laid out.

The Report for 1838 refers to the part of the school which had then been built as:

> " * * * a large stone edifice appropriated to the manufactur-

ing department, and other purposes, and already occupied by the blind."

The year 1839 throws little light on the development of the 34th Street property except that the Report of the Building Committee leaves the following record:

"The agent of the State Prison at Sing Sing has agreed to furnish the cut stone, at prices as per memorandum hereto annexed."

but the scale of prices, which would be of interest today, has not been found.

Both progress and difficulties came with 1840 and from the Building Committee Report for that year we learn:

"That the main or centre building is now completed, with the exception of the piazza, which will be put up as soon as the old building is removed. * * *

"In consequence of the elevation of the ground from the new building to the rear of the premises, the water runs to the entire rear of the new building, rendering a removal of the surplus earth requisite, and although accompanied by considerable expense, it should have immediate attention. New fences are necessary not only for the division of yards but around the entire premises; the old are so much decayed that they are not worth repairs. Cisterns, privies, and wells, stables and sheds, must all be new; some have been destroyed by the erection of the new buildings; those now used will be destroyed by the opening of 33rd Street, and the regulating of the grounds."

Among the items of expense mentioned in the Report is one "for cellar, $500." Although the Report refers to the main or center building, it should be noted that there was no cellar under any part of the main or center building and consequently the item of expense mentioned doubtless refers to the cellar under the south wing or to part of it.

At the end of 1840 the cost of the south wing was still a problem and the Superintendent of the Building Committee under date of December 28, 1840, reports:

"I have, at your request, estimated the cost of the *south wing*,

which is intended to complete the entire building; the wing being arranged for kitchen, laundry, bathing rooms, storerooms for the domestic department, and the third story for dormitory of female pupils, as per plan, will cost about $17,000."

In the same year the Report of the Special Committee to appropriate the several rooms in the new buildings brings interesting changes in the plans to light and also the fact that at a meeting of the Board of Managers held on September 2, 1840 the Committee was granted:

" * * * power to make a new entrance to the main building by making an entrance from the centre door to the main hall, should they deem it expedient; * * * "

which makes it clear that originally the public entrances to the new building must have been planned to be on the court lying east of the main building and between the wings.

This conclusion seems to be borne out by the fact that the doors at the ends of the center building (Figure 2) did not appear in the first picture (Frontispiece) and apparently were a change from the original scheme; that neither of them had the characteristics of a public entrance to a large structure; that each was limited in width to that of the window which it replaced; that apparently neither of them ever was used as a main entrance and finally that on the east side of the main or center building, and immediately opposite to these two new doors, were two double doors, adequate in size for public entrances, which opened from the court into extensions of the "spacious hall."

The architecture and stone work of these double doors were identical with and of the same period as the rest of the early masonry on the court and, as long as the school occupied the 34th Street site, they afforded access from the main or center building to the yards in the court.

No record exists to show when or why it was decided to open entrance doors in the two ends of the front of the main building, of which the earliest picture of the school (Frontispiece), as already noted, gives no suggestion, the first reference to them being found in the same Committee report as follows:

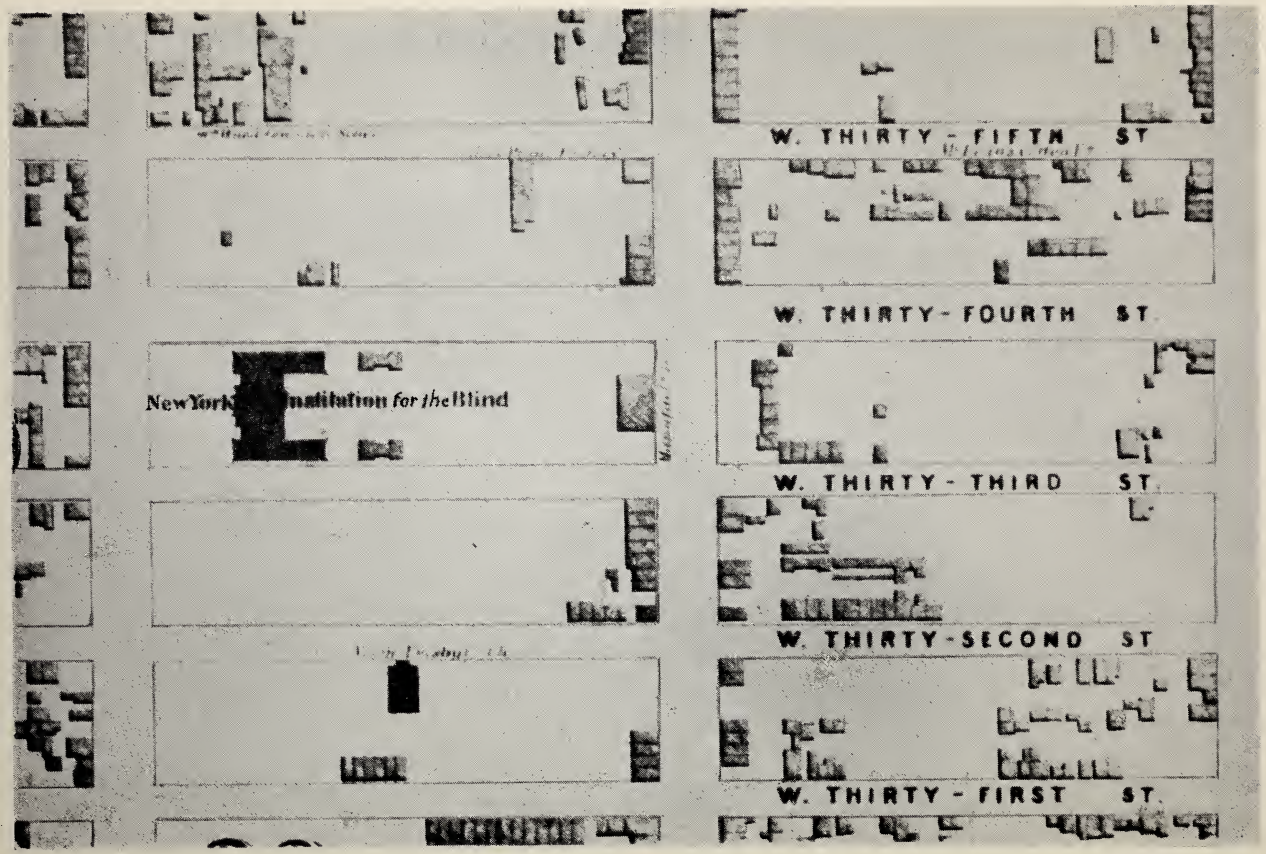


FIGURE 5.

Detail from the M. Dripps Map of New York City, south of 50th Street, 1851.
Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, New York City.

"The Committee determined to change the entrance from the two ends of the main building to its centre in front, and think the appearance and utility of the edifice much improved by the alteration; two rooms are gained by the enclosure of the halls into which the former entrance doors opened, and the new entrance adds much to the effect and beauty of the whole edifice."

From that time the new center entrance remained in use as then established.

Of the north and south entrances to the main or center building, which were opened as such and then apparently at once abandoned, it may be said that the one in the north end served as an entrance to what later became the apartment of the Principal, from the hall of which a fine winding stairway ran up through the thick south wall of the north wing to the second floor and, unchanged, remained in use as long as the school occupied the site; while in the south end the door was closed permanently, the corresponding stairway, which led to the second floor of the south wing, was removed and the hall space became part of the Matron's realm.

The progress evidenced by starting to build the school and improve the property did not mean that all was clear sailing, the same Committee Report having left a vivid picture of the difficulties under which the school labored:

"The Committee have not been able to make any provision for either the kitchen or laundry in the new building, but were forced to make temporary arrangements for them in the small stone outbuilding which it was the intention of the Board to have removed. This arrangement is very inconvenient in itself and will, while it lasts, prevent the complete regulation of our grounds.

" * * *

"It has been found impossible to make any arrangement whatever for bathing-rooms; the importance of which to the health and cleanliness of the pupils, is too obvious to require the Committee to say anything on the subject.

" * * *

"In view of these circumstances, the Committee would not

The New-York Institution for the Blind.

FIGURE 6.

New York Institution for the Blind, from "Putnam's Monthly," June 1853.
Courtesy of the Perkins Institute and Massachusetts School for the Blind.

feel that they had done their duty, did they not urge upon the Board the very great and the indispensable necessity of the immediate erection of the south wing of the new building; it is not required merely as a convenient addition to the part which is now built, but as an essential part of the entire plan; without which the rest is imperfect; and without which we have not the full benefit of what is built.

"By the original plan which has been followed in that portion of the building which is completed, the under cellars, the kitchen, the laundry, the baths, the servants' rooms, the dining hall, the girls dormitory, are all placed in the south wing; and all the rooms in the north wing and centre, are appropriated to other purposes equally indispensable.

"The Committee, therefore would respectfully urge upon the Board the absolute necessity of making an early application to the State Legislature on the subject. The New York Institution for the Blind is a State Institution, and one whose object entitles it to, and has gained for it the fostering care of the Legislature."

Of the thrifty hope to recover from the State what had been paid for stone from the State quarry, the Committee says:

"Of the funds already appropriated by the State, $8,000 have in fact returned to its coffers, being paid for stone purchased from the State quarry at Sing Sing.

"Your Committee have no doubt but that the Legislature will * * * refund the money so paid to the State for stone, as was done in the case of the University of the City of New York, and make such other appropriation as will be necessary to build the south wing, and thus complete the whole building on its original plan."

The year 1841 finds the south wing nearly finished and another year should see the task completed. The Committee on Buildings comments:

"That during the past year they have been engaged in causing the erection of *the South Wing*, which is now built and enclosed. * * *

" * * *

"As soon as the weather will permit, the requisite out-build-

FIGURE 7.

New York Institution for the Blind, by W. Wade, engraved by J. C. McRae, c. 1855.
Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, New York City.

ings, cisterns, wells, fences, &c. will be made and the grounds regulated; and the Committee trust that before the close of the next year, the whole will be completed to the satisfaction of the Managers. * * * December 31st, 1841."

On March 23, 1842 the Institution leased the easterly half of the block (of which it already owned the westerly half) from James Boorman for the term of five years with the privilege to purchase at any time during the term for the agreed price of $15,000 and interest at 5% from May 1st, 1842. (Recorded on July 19, 1842 in Liber 429 of Conveyances, page 120.)

No mention of this lease is found in the report for the year 1842 unless it be in the reference to the "carriage way" "to the Eighth Avenue" in the last paragraph of the report of the Committee on Buildings, but the report for 1842 mentions the tract "an area of about 3 Acres" and its development, while from the report for 1845 we learn that the purchase price was to come from an appropriation of $25,000 made by the Legislature "at its last session."

The progress during 1842 brought development of the site to completion as shown by the Report of the Committee on Buildings:

"The south wing has been entirely completed and appropriated to the accommodation of the females, the third or upper story being 126 by 25 feet, and is used for their dormitory, at the west end of which is an apartment for the instructress, the partition being so constructed as to enable her to supervise the entire room, while she enjoys all the privacy that could be desired, and the whole is well ventilated by flues in the walls with apertures above and below. This room affords ample space for 40 beds, and has been furnished with iron bedsteads, which have been much approved by all who have examined them. The second story is divided into four apartments, the westernmost one being used for a room for invalids, and the others for school, sewing and sitting rooms. Their exposure renders them light, cheerful, and well adapted for those purposes, as the Board will allow on inspection. The first floor or basement is subdivided into five apartments: that fronting the west being used for the manufacture of

paste-board work, the middle one being the kitchen, which is 24 feet 6 inches, by 35 feet 6 inches, in which is a large commodious range, and a large 'Steam Generator,' possessing capacity for cooking for any number of pupils that can ever require its services, and so connected with the laundry, wash, and bathing rooms adjoining it, as to heat the water in the tubs of the former, and the reservoir of the latter, to any temperature below boiling point. The bathing room is fitted up with 3 bathing tubs of the most approved and substantial description, having reservoirs for hot and cold water. There is, adjoining the washroom, an apartment for girls fitted up with 12 basins for washing, so constructed as to afford them every facility their condition requires, and your Committee have, in these latter particulars especially, endeavored to supply those in charge of the kitchen and laundry with every reasonable convenience. Under the whole is a spacious cellar, and a vault extends the entire length of this wing, to be used for fuel. In the completion of this section of the work, as in all the other arrangements and alterations, your committee have studied to combine durability with neatness and economy, whether as respects expense or room.

"In the main building no essential alteration has been made, save to connect the room south of the dining room, by opening a passage, and appropriating that room for the especial use of the females, thus securing a separation of the sexes while at their meals.

"A piazza has been built in the rear of this building, extending from wing to wing,* affording from the second story, which is divided in the centre by a partition, a fine promenade for the boys and girls respectively; the lower floor, or that below being flagged. Your Committee has caused the whole of this building, together with the north wing, to be well pointed with patent cement.

"The north wing has undergone considerable alteration. The third story, which is of the same size as that in the south wing, and is used as a dormitory for the boys, is ventilated by three of Espy's ventilators, which have met the expectations promised by the inventor. The west end of this floor

*Removed later.

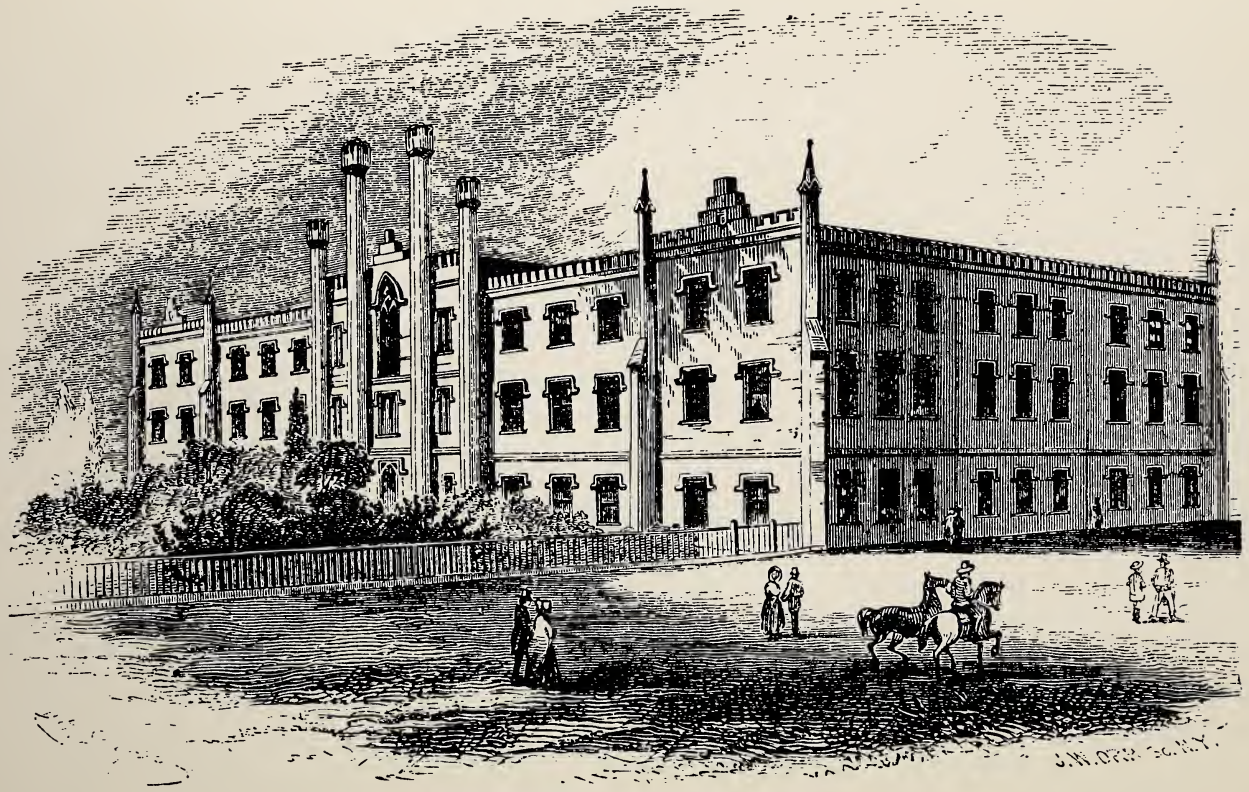
is partitioned off, like that of the south wing, and used by the male teacher, who overlooks the occupants of the dormitory. The west end of the second story is appropriated for a sick room for the male pupils, while the other portions may be used as occasion shall require, for an additional dormitory.

"The basement is used for the wicker workshop, which has been extended, and at the east end wash and bathing rooms for the boys have been constructed, suitably fitted up with 24 basins and 3 baths, boilers, reservoirs, &c. Windows have been made on the south side of this wing, to correspond with those in the south wing, which had been omitted while the embankment which has recently been removed, remained.

"Two neat and spacious out-buildings have been erected, with conveniences for the sexes in either, and connected with their respective wings by a covered lattice way, which is flagged.

These buildings are also used for stabling and carriage-houses, the centre being open, that the horses and vehicles of those visiting the Institution may be driven under with facility. Above are store rooms for the raw material and the manufactured article.

"The yard has been graded to the level of the site of the building to a short distance east of the stables, whence it gradually ascends to the natural level. A carriage way is being dug from this point to the Eighth Avenue, for the convenience of those entering from that side. A drain or sewer has been made through the centre of the yard, to take off the surplus water from the yard, and the north and south wings. A well, with an abundant supply of good water has been dug, and two pumps placed therein. A substantial close fence has been run through the centre of the yard between these pumps, thus dividing it equally to the east end of the stables, and the Committee recommend a cross fence at its terminus, for the present at least. Two commodious cisterns have also been constructed. In front, a neat open fence has been put up along the line of the Ninth Avenue, from Thirty-third to Thirty-fourth street. The whole of the buildings have thus been put in a state for occupancy, and are mostly so occupied at present."



INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND.

FIGURE 8

New York Institution for the Blind, from the "National Magazine," September, 1855, J. W. Orr, Sc.
Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

Many years later an abandoned well and a brick cistern 10 or 12 feet in diameter and of considerable depth with an arched roof and manhole covered by a stone slab were discovered under the pavement in the northwest corner of the "boys' yard," near the main or center building.

The latter was doubtless one of the "commodious cisterns" mentioned in the Committee's Report for 1842 but the well could not have been the one described by the Committee, which was located "to the east end of the stables" and midway between the outbuildings (Figure 5), while the well found under the pavement was west of that point and north of the center line between the wings.

To remove any future hazard, both well and cistern were filled with earth.

The second known picture of the buildings (Figure 2) appeared in the Report for 1842. Comparing this illustration with the Frontispiece, it will be observed that the center door is common to both while in Figure 2 there are two doors not shown in the Frontispiece, one at each end of the main or center building, each of which replaced a window shown in the original.

Even without original plans and subsequent revisions, it is clear that the center door in the Frontispiece, which seems to be and later became a principal entrance, was originally but a means of access to the space lying west of the building rather than a public entrance, as its formal detail might seem to imply.

Another early picture of the school is found in the Report for 1843 (Figure 3). It differs from the former ones in that it shows the structure in perspective and affords a view of the 34th Street side of the north wing.

A fine development of the property, namely, its use for athletics, and the alterations in the buildings, rendered necessary by the growth of the school, are brought to light in the Report for 1844, which says in part:

> " * * * The Board of Managers are so impressed with the importance of extending to their pupils greater facilities in this particular, (athletics) that they have commenced arrang-

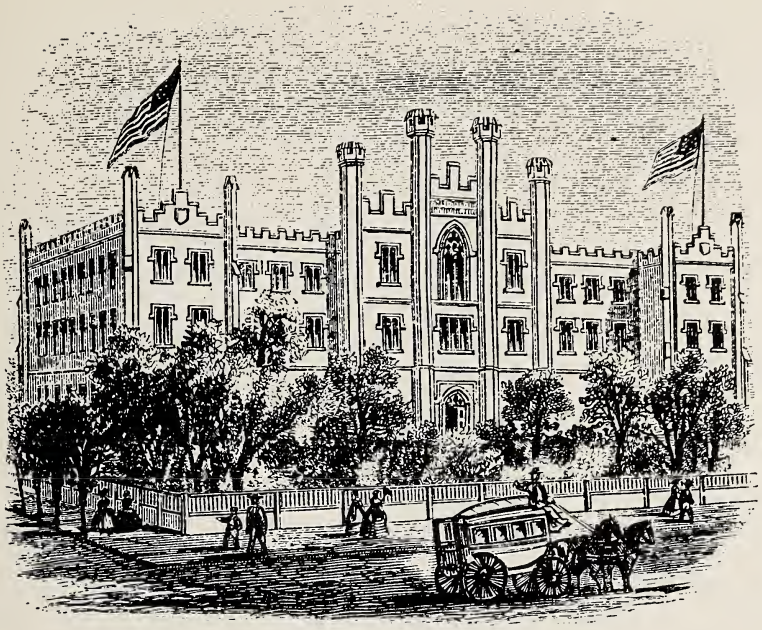
ing the grounds at the rear of their buildings (an area of about 3 acres) for this purpose; it will be ready for use on the opening of the spring, and having been carefully graded to a uniform surface, with commodious walks, laid out in right lines, will be available for exercise even to the *Blind*, and the Board indulge the hope that it will add an important feature to the means already devised for preserving and continuing the health of those entrusted to their charge. * * * Superadded to these efforts to preserve health, commodious baths have heretofore been erected for the use of the pupils, male, and female, and personal cleanliness enjoined upon them as a duty. The benefits resulting from these will be still more available when the exhaustless supply of water derived from the Croton, shall have been introduced;—a period not remote.

" * * *

" * * * The great increase in the number of pupils during the past year, rendered extensive alterations in the house necessary in order to furnish the required facilities for their education, and personal comfort,—while the growth of the city has compelled the Board of Managers to grade the streets on the north and south sides of the square occupied by the Institution, and to excavate and remove from their grounds, a very large quantity of surplus earth. These works, not of choice, but of necessity, though commenced, and prosecuted with the utmost economy, have placed the Institution in debt, and which must be increased by prospective demands upon the treasury for the paving of these streets,—the construction of a sewer in the Eighth Avenue, now ordered by the city government, and the early introduction into the house of the Croton water."

This brief survey of the achievements of the men who conceived the school and brought it into being, awakens interest in the amount of capital invested in land, buildings and equipment as well as the sources from which it had been received, and fortunately the Report for 1845 affords a summary financial statement of what had been invested up to that time as well as also a glimpse into the future:

"The amount paid for the Buildings and Real Estate occupied by the Institution, up to this time, is as follows:



INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND.

Ninth Avenue, between Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth Streets.

MANAGERS.

Augustus Schell,
Robert S. Hone,
William H. Church, M. D.,
Waldo Hutchins,
Charles K. Tuckerman,
James Lenox Kennedy,
Daniel H. Tompkins,
D. Lydig Suydam,
Nathaniel P. Hosack,
Joseph Grafton,
T. Bailey Myers,
Newbold Edgar,
Edward C. Donnelly,
James Couper Lord,
Alfred Schermerhorn,
John Treat Irving,
John Crosby Brown,
Alex. Van Rensselaer,
Clarkson N. Potter,
James M. McLean.

OFFICERS OF THE BOARD.

Augustus Schell, *President.*
Robert S. Hone, *Vice-President.*
T. Bailey Myers, *Recording Secretary.*
Chas. K. Tuckerman, *Corresponding Secretary.*
James L. Kennedy, *Treasurer.*

OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

William B. Wait, *Superintendent.*
ATTENDING PHYSICIAN—J. W. G. Clements, M. D.
CONSULTING PHYSICIAN—Edward L. Beadle, M. D.
CONSULTING SURGEONS—Abram Dubois, M. D., John H. Hinton, M. D

FIGURE 9.
New York Institution for the Blind, from Valentine's Manual of the City of New York, 1865.

"Ground, 32 lots, westerly half of the block..... $13,130.00
"Buildings up to the time they were occupied..... 68,644.88
"Additions, and permanent alterations made since, including regulating streets and grounds, and fencing 7,057.41

"Cost of Ground and Buildings..... $88,832.29
"To which add for Furniture, Books, Musical Instruments, say at least..... 8,000.00

"Total Capital now invested in the Education of the Blind $96,832.29
"Of that sum, the State has furnished $42,000.00
"Individual donations, legacies, &c. . . . 54,832.29 $96,832.29

"Of the appropriation of $25,000 made by the Legislature at its last Session, the sum of $5,000 has been received, and applied to the payment of the balance then due to our Treasurer for advances made by him which, on the 31st of December, 1844, amounted to $10,818.82. The sum yet to be received of that appropriation $20,000, is pledged for the payment of the easterly half, (32 lots) of the block of ground occupied by the Institution, bought at $15,000, to which must be added such interest as may accrue thereon, at the rate of five per cent. per annum, from the date of the contract to the final payment of the debt, which will then add so much to the capital embarked in the enterprise, making at that time, a total of about $116,000.00"

In the absence of the plans, the descriptions in the reports leave much to be desired but a map of the city south of 50th Street, by M. Dripps (1851) (Figure 5) affords a bird's eye view of the layout, showing the outlines of the main structure, wings and outbuildings, from which it is easy to visualize the progress of the construction as described, from the north wing, which was built first, to completion. Comparing Figure 5 with the same city blocks in Figure 1, presents a clear view of the development of the city as shown by the maps, the publication dates of which being separated by a span of seven years.

On the Eighth Avenue end of the block occupied by the

school, we note in Figure 5 a building designated as "Manufactg Dept." which with Figure 4, showing a building in the same location, are the only known illustrations of the ill fated working home venture into which the Institution was drawn shortly after its organization.

Although the early reports contain many brief descriptions of parts of the original buildings, the Report for 1845 gives an interesting over all picture in the following words:

> "The grounds at present occupied by the Institution, extend from the 8th to the 9th Avenues, and from 33d to 34th st., being 800 feet in length, by 200 in width. The main edifice consists of a centre building, 117 feet long by 60 feet wide, and two wings each of 130 feet in length and 29 in breadth. The height of the whole is three stories, and the length of the front, including the wings, is 175 feet. It is constructed of Sing Sing marble, in the modern Gothic style of architecture. A spacious hall, 8 feet wide extends through the entire length of the main building in the first and second stories, and besides the apartments appropriated to domestic purposes, with sitting rooms, store rooms, music rooms, library, office &c., the building contains a Chapel 60 feet long by 40 wide; two dormitories each 130 feet long, and 25 wide, one for female and the other for male pupils; and an additional dormitory for male pupils 60 feet long by 25 feet wide; two school rooms, each 23 feet by 40, with suitable recitation rooms adjoining; a willow ware shop, 92 feet by 24; a weaving shop, 22 by 12 feet, and a band box shop, 32 feet by 24.
>
> "Suitable out-buildings are also constructed for stable and carriage room, depositories for materials and stock for the manufacturing departments, &c. The grounds are now regulated, and separated into two divisions for the male and female pupils, planted with trees and shrubbery, and laid out into commodious walks adapted to the peculiar wants of those for whom they are intended."

On May 6, 1847 The New York Institution for the Blind took title to the easterly half of the block by deed from James Boorman and wife dated May 6, 1847 and recorded on December 29, 1849 in Liber 530 of Conveyances, page 401, and then owned

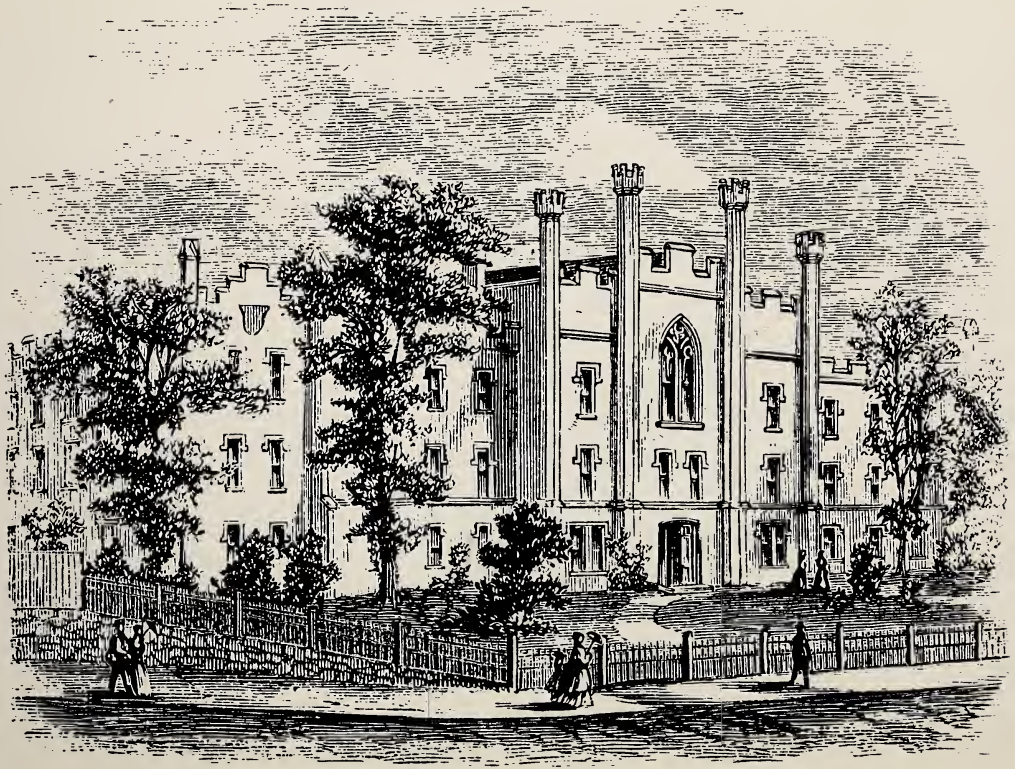


FIGURE 10.

New York Institution for the Blind, from the Manual of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1868. Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, New York City.

a tract 800 feet long by 200 feet wide and bounded by Eighth and Ninth Avenues and 33rd and 34th Streets.

Except for minor interior alterations and improvements, the school buildings on the original site thereafter remained unchanged until 1870, when extensive enlargements and improvements were made.

It is true that a movement, started about 1840, to add a working home feature to the other functions of the school, ultimately resulted in the erection of substantial buildings for that purpose on the Eighth Avenue end of the property but the new venture nearly wrecked the Institution and resulted in the necessity to sell the eastern half of the land acquired from Mr. Boorman in 1847, and that part of the property will be dismissed from further consideration but reference may well be made to comments in the reports from year to year, which mirror the development of the city and the improvement in the school premises.

The introduction of Croton water and the connection with the sewer in Eighth Avenue were important events in the progress of the school of which the Report of the Committee on Repairs and Improvements for 1847 recounts:

"The chief work effected as regards expense—and second only to the introduction of the Croton water in convenience—has been the construction of a sewer about 700 feet in length, connecting the kitchen bathing rooms, laundry and out-offices with the public sewer in the Eighth Avenue, and permanently and effectually disposing of all waste water from the house, as well as night soil from the privies.

"This sewer has been built of the most approved form, with the water course seven feet below the surface, eight inch walls, and carried through the grounds of the Institution; thus leaving its entire control with the Board, and is also provided with stench traps to intercept all disagreeable odors.

"The committee have been untiring in their efforts to induce the aqueduct board to lay the mains for the Croton water up to the Institution, and through the zealous and kind co-operation of James A. Coffin, Esq., the efficient president of that board, this, during the present month (December, 1847), has

been effected, and the water is now procuring (sic) its ample and healthful supplies throughout the house. In consummating an object so important to the convenience, cleanliness, and comfort of the Institution and inmates, the committee feel that a work of priceless value has been achieved.

"In directing the plumbers work for the distribution of the water, the old fixtures have been used in all cases where they were deemed of sufficient strength, and in such repair as would justify it; but much of them ought in fact to be rejected, and replaced with new materials; this is especially the case with the various water tanks, and also with the bathing tubs, all of which having originally been lined with very light lead, were found to leak badly; these have been carefully mended, and one of the tanks new lined; it is supposed that these fixtures will now last till spring, perhaps longer. The committee takes the occasion, however, to indicate to the Board, their opinion, that whenever these tanks and bathing tubs require to be replaced with new ones, such of the former as may be retained, and all the latter, should be lined with copper, and tinned; subjected, as they are, to constant, and not very careful use, so soft a metal as lead, is liable to daily injury, and consequently to leakage—rotting the floor timbers and damaging the ceilings.

"A street hydrant has been placed at the south end of the building, and if the Board would direct the purchase of hose for this, as well as for the smaller openings in the house, great security from fire would result, and the annual premium charged for insurance be considerably reduced.

" * * *

"The ornamental fence in front of the buildings has been thoroughly painted during the past summer; Quimbey's lightning rods put up in the most approved manner; the planting of trees and shrubbery, and the general improvement of the grounds continued, and carefully attended to, while every duty with which this committee is charged, has received prompt attention, and they hope with satisfactory results to the Board.

"The setting of curb and gutter stones opposite the grounds in 33d and 34th streets, is a work which the city government

will soon require to be done, and which in fact ought to be done by this Board voluntarily, whenever the low price of labor and materials would make it economical to do so, thereby saving the expense of a corporation assessment, and the payment of collection fees. The fences also, opposite the two wings of the house should be put up, to complete the enclosure of the block."

In the Report for 1849 we find:

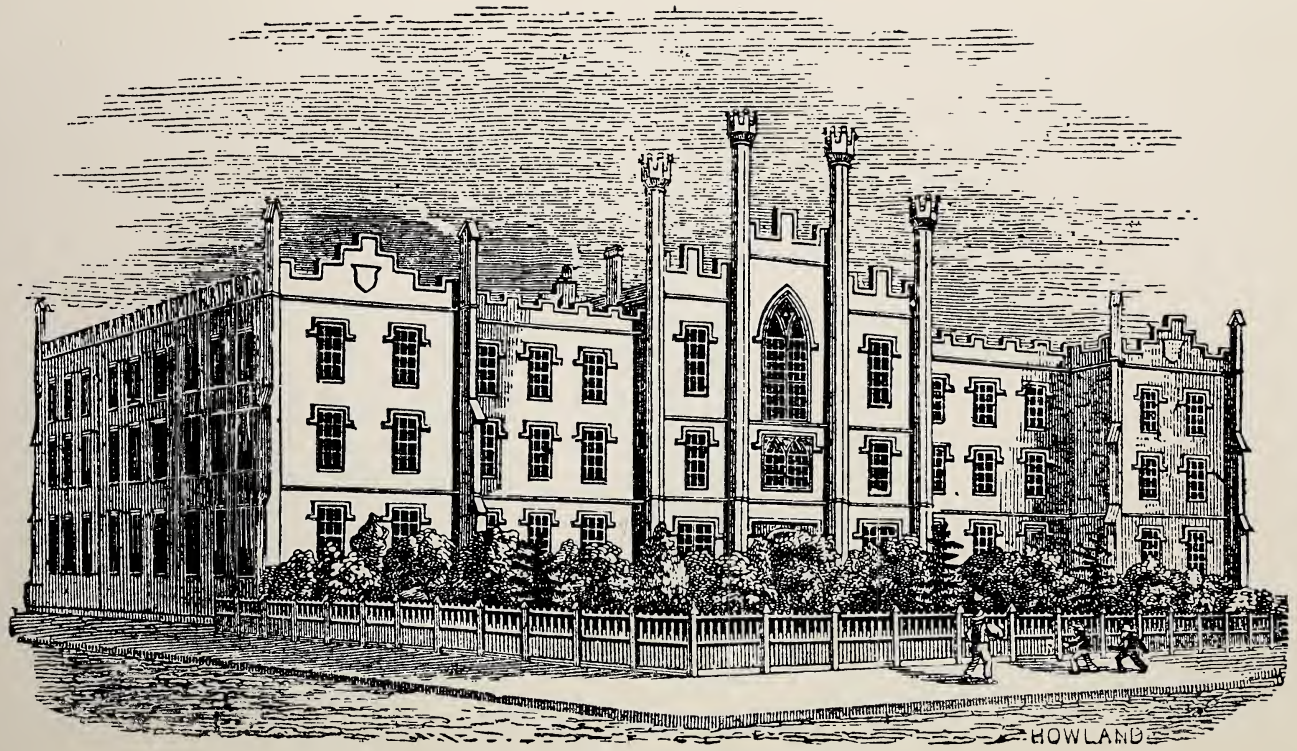
"The Cost of fitting and furnishing our new manufacturing department, has swelled our expenditures considerably beyond the usual amount. The public improvements which are rapidly progressing in the vicinity of the Institution must continue to occasion similar extraordinary drafts upon our treasury and to which its regular sources of income must be inadequate. 33rd and 34th Streets are still unpaved, and the sidewalks unflagged, and a sewer is now in the course of construction in the 9th Avenue, which, from the rocky nature of the soil, must occasion a heavy assessment, to mature during the next year; and an assessment for $850. for opening a sewer in the 8th Avenue has been sometime due."

Improvement in toilet facilities is also recorded in the Report for that year:

"The south privy has been filled up, and a connection made with the sewer. As this was obliged to be contracted in its size where it passes under the new building, it was deemed advisable to connect only one privy at first, to ascertain if its contents would be discharged into the sewer in the 8th Avenue without becoming obstructed; as this was found to be the case, the connection of the other may be made whenever the convenient time arrives."

By 1850 gas for lighting had become available in that part of the city of which and other matters the Report for 1850 says in part:

"The introduction of gas into our new building, which it is highly desirable to accomplish at the earliest possible moment, will, probably, more than exhaust the balance remaining in the treasurer's hands; and should the assessment, soon to be levied, for the construction of a sewer in the Ninth Avenue,



INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND.

FIGURE 11.

New York Institution for the Blind, from "Phelps New York City Guide," 1869.
Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

(which, owing to the rocky nature of the soil has been an extremely expensive undertaking) be rigidly exacted, the institution must fall in arrears, as its income from regular sources barely suffices for its economical and necessary expenses."

and the Committee on Repairs and Improvements comments:

"The fence, between the grass plots in the rear of the New Building, and also the one between the yards of the Old Building, being in a dilapidated condition, have been renewed in a more substantial manner.

"The high board fences on Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth streets, have been extended from the gateways on either side to the Western extremities of the main building. (Figures 4, 10 and 20). This improvement gives the premises a much neater appearance. Iron bars have been placed on the windows of the front basement of the New Building, and to several a strong wire netting has been attached for greater protection and security.

"During the Summer vacation, the Committee were busily employed—in the North Wing—the washing arrangement in the Boy's Department, (which were in a most miserable condition,) have been entirely removed and replaced by others of a much more substantial character. The Bath Tubs in the same apartment have been enclosed by a partition, forming a small and comfortable room—shower baths have also been erected therein. The privy on this side of the premises has been connected with the sewer.

"In the South wing, very extensive and important repairs and improvements were found to be necessary, and have, consequently, entailed on the Committee a heavy expense. On examination, the Croton and Steam apparatus in the Kitchen and Laundry, were found to be so exceedingly defective as to require an almost complete renewal. The waste pipes in the cellar have also been renewed. In the two sick rooms, and in the Girl's dormitory, water closets have been placed, and also hot and cold water arrangements; the comfort and convenience of these improvements have been already greatly appreciated by the pupils.

"A portion of the kitchen has also been partitioned off, forming

FIGURE 12.

Earliest known photograph of the New York Institution for the Blind after additions of 1870. Note the effect of motion of pedestrians during exposure of plate.

a most excellent and comfortable Bathing Room for the use of the officers of the Institution.

"* * *

"An application has been made to the 'Manhattan Gas Light Company,' to extend the main pipe in the Eighth avenue to the corner of Thirty-fourth street, and introduce Gas in various parts of the New Building. To this date, however, no action has been taken on the subject."

The reference to "the gateways on either side" in the Report of the Committee on Repairs is the only known record relating to the carriage entrances into the original premises purchased from Mr. Boorman.

Pursuant to the provisions of the lease, 34th Street was opened between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and one of the gateways led to that street but later it was closed, apparently as a result of the change of grade complained of in the Reports for 1851 and 1852. The illustrations showing the retaining wall (Figures 17, 19 and 20) indicate that it was of a height such as to preclude a carriage entrance at the east end of the property.

The other gate opened on 33rd Street and remained in use as long as the school occupied the premises.

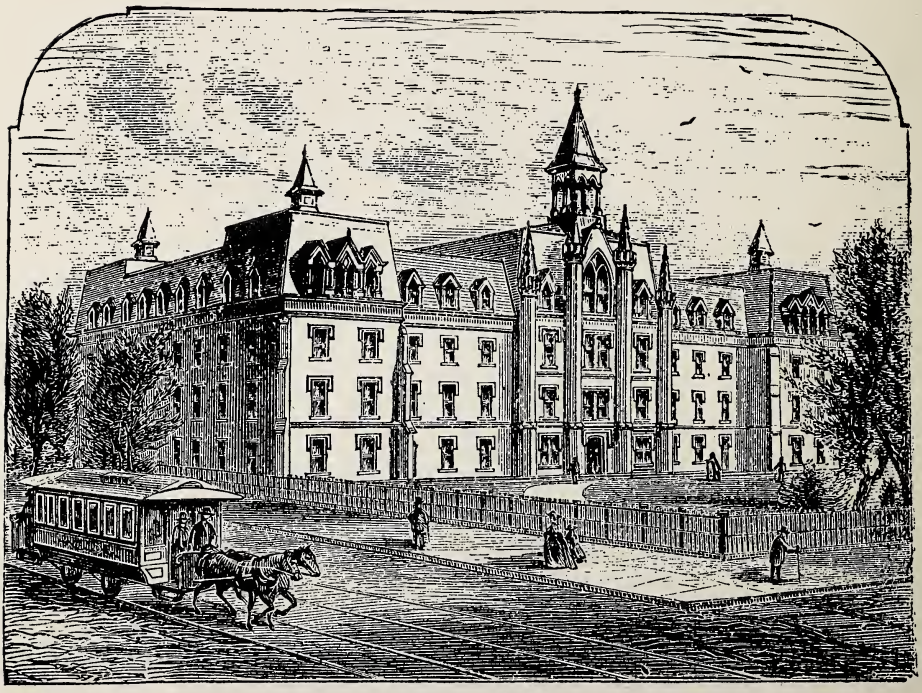
The year 1850 also produced in Henry Hoff's colored lithograph (Figure 4) the only known comprehensive view of the south side of the Institution property and it alone of the early pictures of the school affords graphic details of the surroundings.

Viewed from a point west of Ninth Avenue and south of 33rd Street, now included in the excavation for the Pennsylvania Railroad, the crenelated Norman school building dominates the scene while in the foreground a hooded gig drives down unpaved Ninth Avenue, a huntsman, dog at heel, displays the result of the chase,—spirits of the past not to be evoked from the matter-of-fact reports of the Managers and Committees.

The Report for 1851 tells of hard times, of $4,216.63 in the treasury, of an unpaid assessment of $2,123.41 for the Ninth Avenue sewer and adds:

" * * * The Corporation of the city have decided to reduce the grade of thirty-fourth street, and to pave the same. The work

THIRTY-SEVENTH
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MANAGERS
OF THE
NEW YORK
INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND
TO THE
LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE,
FOR THE YEAR 1872.



LUX ORITUR.

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them."—ISAIAH xliii, 16.

NEW YORK:
BRADSTREET PRESS, 279 BROADWAY.
1873.

FIGURE 13
New York Institution for the Blind, from the Report for 1872.

has been commenced, and will, when completed, involve the institution in another heavy assessment."

In connection with high cost of repairs, etc., the Report for 1852 throws light on the political methods of that period:

"But the heaviest disbursement which has fallen upon the Institution has been caused by a matter which has been every way a damage to the Institution, and of no benefit to any body except the individuals who, for private ends, procured the passage of an ordinance by the Common Council of our city rendering (sic) it.

"The premises of the Institution extend along Thirty-fourth street from the Eighth to the Ninth Avenue. This part of Thirty-fourth street was, some time since, graded and regulated by the Common Council, and a heavy assessment paid by the Institution for the same.

"Some time during the past year, an ordinance was procured to be passed, changing very materially the grade of Thirty-fourth street, to the extent in some places of several feet. This change of grade rendered indispensable the erection of an expensive wall to sustain the ground and buildings of the Institution, the cost of which, as will appear from the report of the Committee on Repairs and Improvements, amounts to several thousand dollars. It is to be regretted that so expensive an operation should not have been accompanied by a corresponding benefit to the property upon which it will fall, for, unfortunately, the grade has been very much injured, and the value of the property impaired by the alteration.

"Had there been any intimation of the proposed ordinance before its passage, the most strenuous opposition would have been made by the Managers of the Institution, and by every owner of property affected by it; but the whole affair was managed in such a way that the ordinance had become a law, and a contract made to change the grade, before any of the parties interested were aware that the first step was taken.

"As it was, the consequent expense of the wall was unavoidably though most reluctantly incurred."

Again referring to the expenditure for "wall in Thirty-fourth street, $4,024.86" the Report says:

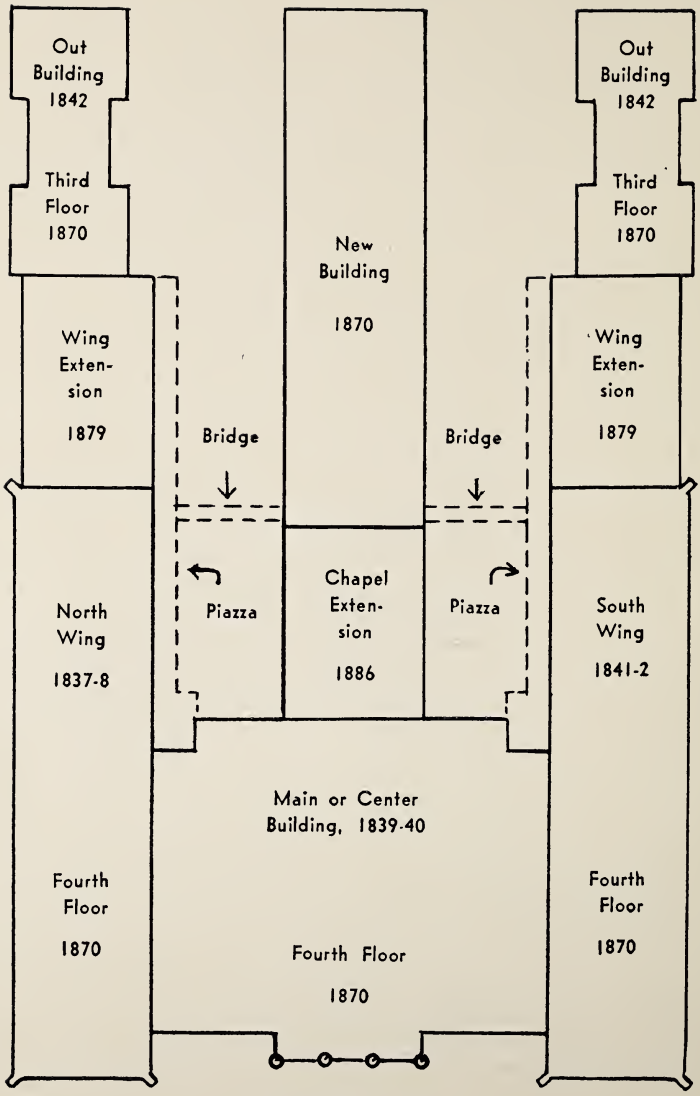


FIGURE 14.

Diagram of ground plan of original buildings of the New York Institution for the Blind and of later additions with dates of construction.

"The last item is the cost of the wall (Figures 10 and 12) erected in Thirty-fourth street, an expenditure rendered necessary by the alteration of the grade of that street.

" * * * It was most reluctantly incurred, but the ordinance of the Corporation left no alternative."

The report of the Committee on Repairs and Improvements for 1853 tells of the introduction of gas:

"During the summer, gas has been introduced throughout the Main Building, and also into the Sales Rooms and Hall of manufacturing department on 8th avenue at a cost of $593.32."

Prior to 1837, when the plans for the permanent buildings of the Institution were developed, the number of pupils apparently did not exceed six, but the management envisioned greater things and the original buildings served until 1870, by which time the school had grown to 145 pupils and additional space became necessary.

In that year substantial additions and alterations were made,—another floor under a mansard roof was added to all the original structures and an additional new three story brick building rose at the end of the court midway between the outbuildings at the east end of the property. It was connected to the center or main building by "the corridors,"—(a double one story arcade furnished with hinged windows, which could be raised in summer, and a wall which separated the boys' "corridor" from that of the girls) and was also connected to the piazzas of the respective wings by bridges which, except during inclement weather, provided satisfactory means of access to the school and living quarters.

The earliest known photograph of the school as it appeared after the completion of the improvements in 1870 is shown in Figure 12.

Here one sees the circular path from the gate to the main entrance, the iron bars installed in the first floor windows for greater security, the costly retaining wall necessitated by the city ordinance re-regulating 34th Street (of which the Managers complained in the Report for 1852) and the door in the wall of the north wing which gave access from the side yard to the "spacious hall, eight feet wide," which latter extended the entire

length of the building to the 33rd Street front where a similar door led to the side yard along the other wing.

In the foreground are the tracks of the horse car lines on Ninth Avenue and on 34th Street, long since left behind in the march of progress, nor, in 1870, had the Ninth Avenue Elevated Railroad with its station at this corner yet put in an appearance, only to disappear from the scene in less than seventy years. Gone, too, are "Dr. Demarest, Dentist, 316 West 34th St." and "Dr. Bellows" whose public notices adorn one of the telegraph poles in the foreground.

This photograph furnished the basis for the picture of the school after the changes, which later for years adorned the covers of the Annual Reports, (Figure 13) but the artist played fast and loose with many of the details recorded by the camera,— gone are the snow, the telegraph poles, the street lamps, the trees, which stood for decades, while others leaved in their stead and in the foreground appears one of the "Green Line horse cars" on its way to the ferry at the foot of West 42nd Street, thence to return by a circuitous route to the ferry house on the East River at the foot of Grand Street. It was sometimes known as the "Emigrant Line" and for a large part of its route used the tracks of other street railways.

Unfortunately, no picture is known of the new building then built at the east end of the center court, which, with the mansard floor on the original buildings and the installation of steam heat, worked great changes in the physical layout and in the practical operation of the school.

Other than the brief references to the enlargements and improvements which are found in the Reports for 1870, 1871 and 1872, no record is known:

Report for 1870:

"The Institution has, during the past year, erected a new building, and made extensive improvements and repairs on its present buildings at a cost of about one hundred and ten thousand dollars, and for the purpose of providing means to meet the expenses thereof the Institution has executed a mortgage on its property on the Ninth Avenue, between Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth streets, in the City of New

York, to secure the payment of one hundred thousand dollars, in bonds of one thousand dollars each.

"For the purpose of perpetuating the Legacy and Donation Fund herein mentioned, the same has been funded in the bonds of the Institution, secured by said mortgage.

"The new building which has been erected, and the extensive improvements and repairs which have been made, will add largely to the capacity of the Institution, and enable it to give increased facilities for the education of the pupils, and extend its usefulness.

" * * *

"By the additions and alterations which have been made in the buildings, the school rooms, dormitories and dining rooms have been greatly enlarged and improved. Many additional comforts and conveniences have been provided for the pupils, which, for lack of room were heretofore wanting.

"Everything has been done with a view to the health, safety and comfort of the inmates; and, at present, this Institution is in all respects equal to any in the country."

Report for 1871:

"The managers are happy to state that the new building and improvements referred to in their last Annual Report as contemplated have been completed, and are now in full use. By these additions and changes the comforts and efficiency of the Institution have been vastly improved, the old buildings being entirely renovated and furnished with the latest improvements in drainage, ventilation, heating, safety of egress, and general convenience.

Report for 1872:

"The extensive and valuable improvements which the Managers have been enabled to make in the buildings of the Institution within the last two years, the additional building, the extended and well ventilated dormitories, hospital and school rooms, although attended with a large outlay of the funds of the Institution, have already given a gratifying return in their effects upon the health and comfort of the pupils, in which the State authorities cannot but feel an interest.

FIGURE 15.

New York Institution for the Blind during construction of Pennsylvania Station.
Note protective fence at the right.

"It may be remarked that these alterations and extensions have been made, not only with reference to the health of the pupils, but with particular regard to their safety in case of conflagration. As a proper safeguard, iron pipes have been introduced, connected with two large steam pumps placed in the building, and carried up both pairs of main stairs to the fourth story, and supplied with sufficient hose to throw water on any part of the building. As a further precaution, application was made to the Croton Department for a hydrant in the engine room, to be used in case of fire only. This was not authorized, but the Institution was permitted to make an inch connection with the street main, which it is hoped will be sufficient, in case of fire, to protect the building from serious damage. The Babcock fire extinguisher is also kept in the building, ready for any sudden emergency. The main stair cases, and the doors connecting with them, are of iron, of approved construction, intended to shut off and confine a fire to the section in which it might originate."

The improvements and enlargements of 1870 had so important an influence on the work of the school that they merit a more detailed description than is afforded by the Reports.

A subcellar which extended beyond the east end of the new building and a cellar within the limits of the building provided space for boiler room, engine room and coal vaults, the Woodward boilers having had capacity sufficient to provide steam for the engine room, the laundry (above the engine room and coal vaults but on a level below the first floor of the building) and to heat the entire school.

The first floor of the building was divided in the middle by a narrow hallway, the north half of the floor having provided space for the mattress shop while the south half was devoted to living rooms for the female help.

The second floor was devoted to kitchen, storerooms, scullery, dining facilities for employees and a commodious dining room to accommodate the pupils, teachers and executive staff. The third or top floor provided space for the gymnasium (a new feature in the school), additional rooms for women employees and "sick rooms" for both girls and boys.

FIGURE 16.
New York Institution for the Blind with brick wall and gate house.

In passing, it may be said that the change in the location of the culinary arrangements did not result in moving the bakery which, with its capacious arched fire brick oven and ample storerooms deep in the masonry of the foundations, continued, to the end, to occupy the eastern two spaces in the cellar of the south wing.

At the west end of the new structure separate flights of iron stairs, for the girls and boys respectively, led from the corridors to the dining room and gymnasium floors, while at the east end a similar single flight led to the kitchen, storerooms and sick rooms. The roof of this new building may be seen in Figure 19.

Relieved of these activities, the school found elbow room in the center building and wings.

The main entrance, flanked by reception rooms, opened into the "spacious hall" through which one passed to the iron stairs at each end, in what were originally parts of the wings, the stairs in turn giving access to classrooms, chapel and living quarters on the upper floors, while the well ways provided space for the fire standpipes and hose racks, adequate fire doors being installed on all floors at each end of the "spacious hall." Through the wall of the building on the 33rd Street side a connection to the standpipes was provided for the use of the fire department, but it was years before the value of such connections came to be recognized.

Immediately over the main entrance and the rooms on each side was the "Library," a suite of three rooms, one of which was fitted with book cases carved and panelled to correspond with the architecture of the exterior, and the "Library" provided the meeting place for the Board of Managers and the office of the Principal.

The entire fourth floor of the main or center building and the west end of the wings were devoted to chapel, music classrooms, and music rooms, including the tuning department, each with a piano, while the east end of that floor of both wings provided space for nine rooms for the older boys and girls, each room accommodating four pupils. The other floors of the wings, with small exceptions, were devoted to dormitories, locker rooms,

FIGURE 17.

New York Institution for the Blind c. 1906 with picket fence (removed later) enclosing space between brick wall and stoop line.

lavatories and like facilities, leaving in what was originally the center building ample space for living quarters for the staff, the matron's department and classrooms.

In the period immediately prior to 1870 the entire school was heated by stoves, in some cases connected to the chimney flues through "fireboards" fitted in the fireplace openings and in other cases to special flues intended for use with stoves. The changes of 1870 brought that system of heating the school to an end. The mansard roof effectively closed off every chimney and steam heat took the place of stoves, though the marble mantelpieces and fireplace trimmings remained. There having been no cellars under any part of the original buildings except the south wing, the installation of steam heating apparatus in the main or center building and the north wing presented considerable difficulty and resulted in an elaborate system of trenches under the first or ground floor to serve for pipe galleries, which consisted of a main passage under the "spacious hall" and down the north wing, with lateral branches leading from it to each point from which steam pipe risers led to the upper floors, with consequent labor and expense in connection with changes and repairs as long as the buildings were used.

The next enlargement of the school came in 1879, when the spaces between the north and south wings and the respective outbuildings were filled by three story and mansard structures, the street fronts of which were faced with Sing Sing marble like the original structure but the interior walls were of brick. The Sing Sing marble quarries were not in operation at the time but arrangements were made to have the stone gotten out by day labor under the direction of the Superintendent, and the floor beams were ordered direct from mills in the Carolinas and transported by sailing vessels, to be discharged at the foot of West 34th Street, three blocks from the job.

Each of the upper three floors of both additions provided a two room suite for teachers and dormitory space for pupils while connections to the mansard floor of the outbuildings made additional dormitory space available. The ground floors and basements were used for locker rooms, bath rooms and toilets while on the boys' side, part of the top floor was assigned to the piano tuning department.

FIGURE 18.

New York Institution for the Blind showing straight path from main entrance to gate.
Note New Post Office at the right.

The Annual Report for 1879 makes the following references to these additions:

"During the past summer we have erected two large buildings adjoining the main buildings, one of which is on Thirty-third Street, and the other on Thirty-fourth Street, for the general use of the Institution, and have also repaired, enlarged and improved the main building, at a cost in all of about twenty-two thousand dollars. The plans for this work were furnished and the construction carried on by the Superintendent, under the direction of a Committee of the Managers, who have supervised the work as it proceeded, and who have taken great pains to see that it was carefully, substantially and economically done."

The new north building will be seen in Figures 19 and 20.

Another improvement which like the buildings themselves became a local landmark may be briefly mentioned. From the early days of the school at 34th Street, the front or west yard was surrounded by a substantial picket fence, which is seen in the illustrations (Figures 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13), while solid board fences afforded privacy along the wings (Figures 4, 10 and 12).

After the sale of the east half of the block, the front yard was utilized in good weather as a recreation ground for the girls and boys, alternately, but with the growth of the city the crowds which gathered outside the fence to watch the pupils made it evident that greater seclusion was desirable, in addition to which the open fence was an invitation to trespassers, both old and young.

Accordingly, for the greater privacy which it would afford, a substantial high brick wall was built sometime during the late 70's or early 80's to replace the board fence along 33rd Street, part of the board fence along 34th Street and the entire picket fence around the west or front yard. On Ninth Avenue this new wall was provided with two grilled iron gates midway between 33rd and 34th Streets together with a "gatehouse" in which a guard was on duty every Sunday and at other times as necessary, but, although this arrangement was helpful, the undesirable condition was not entirely relieved until the grills were later replaced by solid iron gates (Figure 16).

FIGURE 19.
Bird's eye view of the New York Institution for the Blind.

The only known photograph showing details of the wall, taken during the construction of the Pennsylvania Station (Figure 16), gives an indication of the effect which modern improvements may have on old structures for at that time, as a result of the excavation, 33rd Street was impassable and it became necessary to shore up the buttress at the southwest corner of the building to prevent it from falling.

The arch over the front gates and the granite tablet bearing the inscription "New York Institution for the Blind" may be seen in the illustration but most of the beautiful trees, of which there were many at one time, had disappeared and of those which remained, the sugar maple, on the right, alone seems to thrive.

In the foreground are the tracks of the Ninth Avenue Elevated Railroad and the extension of the platform of the 34th Street station.

The last addition to the school on the original site came in 1886. It was prompted by the need of a larger meeting hall or chapel, and resulted in a brick structure extending from the service building, erected in 1870, westwardly almost to the east wall of the original main or center building. The first floor on the boys' side provided a play room for the youngsters and on the girls' side additional living quarters for women employees. The second floor was devoted to classrooms and to an innovation,—a teachers' dining room separate from that in which the pupils had their meals, while the top floor, connected to the main building by steel girders, became the east end of the chapel with an adequate stage and exits to the stairs in the west end of the service building, the roof and the north chapel windows being seen in Figure 19.

The only official reference to this improvement is in the Superintendent's Report for 1886:

> "The improvements which have been in progress during the past summer, under my own supervision, have been completed, and cannot fail to facilitate our work and promote the comfort of the school. The enlarged Music Hall will now seat the entire school, and accommodate the many people whom we are glad to receive upon visiting days. Our excellent organ now occupies an alcove at the east end of the room, and is suitably

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FIGURE 20.

Last known picture of the New York Institution for the Blind at 34th Street.

raised above the level of the floor. In front of the organ is a platform, large enough to seat the singing classes and leave room for other purposes upon anniversary occasions.

"The hall is airy, well lighted and heated; its acoustic properties are good, and it is in all respects a most useful and enjoyable feature of our establishment."

The undimensioned diagram, Figure 14, pictures the general building layout from the beginning, with dates gleaned from the records and the bird's eye view, Figure 19, shows the site in its latter days, surrounded by modern structures.

As thus enlarged and improved the premises were occupied until the Institution sold the land and in 1924 moved to its present site on Pelham Parkway, after which the buildings which long had been a landmark were razed to make way for modern commercial structures.

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1831-1944

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